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Carter Centralizes U.S. Intelligence Authority, Draws Fire

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President Carter yesterday signed an executive order that centralizes authority over the nation's intelligence community and for the first time gives the attorney general veto power over covert intelligence activities in the United States or directed against American citizens abroad.

However, the order, which the president called "an important step forward" in assuring that U.S. intelligence activities are both effective and within constitutional and legal bounds, drew sharp criticism from civil libertarians.

In a joint statement, the American Civil Liberties Union and the Center for National Security Studies charged that the order is "breathtaking in [the] scope" of surveillance it authorizes against U.S. citizens.

The order authorizes the attorney general to establish procedures for the collection of "nonpublic information" concerning "United States persons," meaning U.S. citizens, permanent resident aliens and U.S. corporations and organizations.

It lists 11 types of information that could be so collected, including information concerning corporations or organizations that constitutes foreign intelligence, information concerning former or present intelligence agency employees or contracts and information concerning people believed to be acting for a foreign power or engaged in international terrorist or narcotics activities.

The order also requires case-by-case approval by the attorney general for the use of any so-called intrusive surveillance techniques—electronic surveillance, use of television cameras or other monitoring, physical searches and mail openings—against U.S. persons and then only if they are believed acting as an agent of a foreign power.

But the ACLU and the Center for National Security Studies argued that "no American should be subjected to

the intrusive techniques which now require a [court] warrant unless they are believed to be engaged in criminal activity and unless a warrant is issued."

The new authority given the attorney general is an attempt to provide greater protection for U. S. residents against violations of their rights by various intelligence agencies.

The order signed yesterday, at a White House ceremony attended by intelligence agency chiefs and selected members of Congress, supercedes an order signed last February by former President Ford.

The order explicitly directs that the Senate and House intelligence oversight committees be kept informed of U.S. intelligence activities and be given "any information or document" in the possession of the intelligence agencies on request.

The centralization aspects of the order will enhance the control of Central Intelligence Agency Director Stansfield Turner over intelligence activities.

Although the order gave Turner less than he sought in his disputes with other intelligence chiefs, it affirmed his authority over the budgets of U. S. intelligence agencies and gave him authority to assign missions to other intelligence agencies, such as the National Security Agency and the Pentagon's intelligence services.

However, the day-to-day operations of these other agencies will remain independent from Turner in an attempt to balance the president's desire for better coordination among the intelligence services while preserving competition among the different sources of intelligence data.

Turner will head a National Security Council committee, known as the Policy Review Committee, to review the nation's foreign intelligence program and budget and advise the president on the quality of intelligence.

A second NSC committee, to be headed by national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski and known as the Special Coordination Committee, will make recommendations on each covert operation and oversee counter-intelligence activities.

At the signing ceremony, Carter praised Turner, who, according to one news report, was about to be ousted. The White House has strongly denied the report.

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of Turner